



Getting the most from the Eee PC

Do good things really come in small packages? Chris Finnamore shows you how to use Asus's tiny laptop to its fullest

The Eee PC's built-in entertainment and word-processing applications are fairly self-explanatory, but some of the more advanced functions are tricky to access and set up. Our guide ranges from relatively simple stuff such as getting the Eee PC online to advanced power-user features such as using the Linux command prompt. Bear in mind that to take more advanced steps such as installing new programs, your Eee PC will need to be online.

1 GETTING ONLINE

Getting your Eee PC connected using its built-in wireless networking is fairly straightforward. Click on the Internet tab, then click on Wireless Networks. A window appears with all the networks in the vicinity and a bar representing their signal strength. Encrypted networks are represented by a padlock icon on the left. Click on the network you want to access and then click Connect. A new window appears, which asks for your security key. Unlike a Windows PC, the Eee PC doesn't automatically detect the type of encryption used by a wireless network, so you have to select WEP or WPA manually. If you're not sure which one your home wireless network uses, go into your router's wireless configuration page to find out. Type in your security key and click OK. The Eee PC should connect.

If it has trouble connecting, click on the Network icon in the Internet tab to bring up the Network Connections window. Click on your wireless connection, then click the Properties button and the Wireless tab. Here you'll find the advanced options for the wireless connection. Try setting the Mode to Infrastructure and selecting the Any Channel radio button. Re-type your wireless key into the Key box and click OK. The Eee PC should now connect. Check your internet connection is working by clicking on the Web icon in the Internet page and seeing if your home page loads.

2 USING AN EXTERNAL MONITOR, KEYBOARD AND MOUSE

The Eee PC is a great ultra-portable laptop, but it has a tiny screen and keyboard. Fortunately, you don't have to buy a full-size desktop PC for long typing sessions or to avoid eyestrain. You just need a monitor with a standard VGA input and a USB keyboard and mouse.

First, plug a VGA cable from the monitor into the VGA port on the right of the laptop. Then plug your keyboard and mouse into the Eee PC's USB ports; they'll be detected automatically. Click the Settings tab and then click on the Desktop Mode icon. Now click the View external display only radio button.

To give as much desktop area as possible, click the Manual radio button under Resolution and select 1,024x768 from the drop-down box. Most monitors support higher resolutions than this, but 1,024x768 is the Eee PC's maximum. Click OK to apply your changes. The display will now switch to your external screen. It will switch back automatically after a few seconds, so press OK to accept the new display mode.

You can also switch between the Eee PC's display and the external display, or display both at once, by pressing the Fn key and then pressing F5.

3 FILE MANAGEMENT

The Eee PC comes with a word processor, spreadsheet and presentation program, all of which are easy to use. If you're going to use the Eee PC to create documents, it's worth knowing how to store and keep track of your files with the File Manager application. The 2GB Eee PC has around 350MB of available storage as standard. This won't remain free long, so you should also add some external disk space. The Eee PC's memory card slot supports SDHC cards, available in capacities of up to 32GB (we'll be reviewing both SD and SDHC memory cards in next month's *Labs*). You can also plug in USB flash drives, which are recognised automatically by the Eee PC's operating system, and Windows NTFS and FAT32 file systems are supported.

The File Manager application is under the Work tab. It's a simple tree view, with your file locations on the left and the files and folders in each location in the window on the right. Click on My Home in the left-hand window. This shows your My Documents folder, as well as any USB flash drives or SD cards plugged into the Eee PC. You can drag and drop files from the right-hand window into folders displayed in the left-hand tree, or right-click and drag to move a file or create a shortcut (called a Link on the Eee PC). Right-clicking on a file or folder brings up a host of extra options such as creating a new folder, opening a file with a particular program or extracting a compressed archive. You can also view information about a file by right-clicking and selecting Properties.

Dealing with USB flash disks and memory cards is a bit different from in Windows, as you can't just drop or

INTRODUCTION

Asus's Eee PC is one of the most exciting products we've seen. It's a tiny ultra-portable laptop that costs just £215, has a solid-state hard disk and runs a Linux operating system. Eee PCs are selling out all over the place, but those Windows users who've taken the plunge may find the new operating system takes some getting used to, especially if you want to do more than just type.

There's no need to panic, though. We've delved deep into the Eee PC's workings to find out how to get it set up just the way you want it, from getting online and printing to installing new software and customising the desktop.

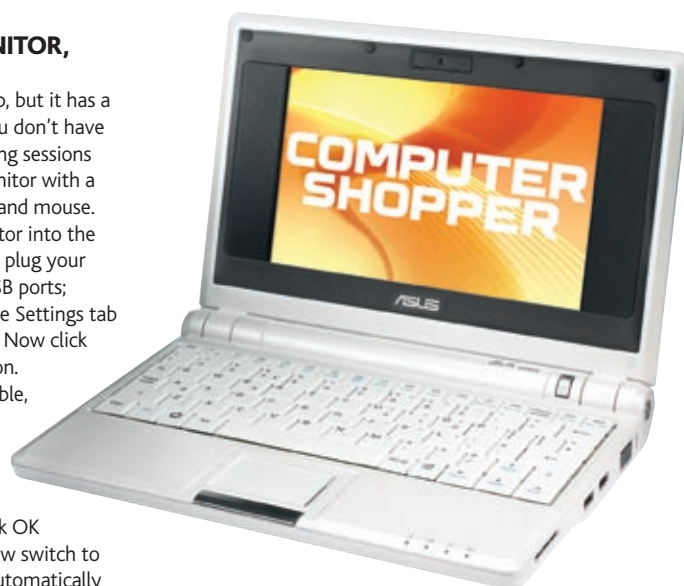
This month's *Mobile Expert* will show you how to get the best from your tiny Eee PC.

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▲ The Eee PC's operating system takes some getting used to, but it's worth exploring the advanced options



paste files directly on to the disk's icon. Instead, when you open the drive you'll see folders named after the disk's partitions. You need to open one of these and copy the files as normal. It's unlikely you'll have more than one partition on a USB flash drive or memory card, so you'll probably just see a folder called partition1.

4 SETTING UP A PRINTER

The Eee PC has a printer setup wizard, so adding a USB printer is simple. Plug your printer into a USB port and turn it on. Make sure your Eee PC is connected to the internet. Click the Settings tab, then click on Printers. In the new window, click Add. We'll assume you're adding a local rather than a network printer, so click the Local printer radio button and Next. The wizard detects your printer, and displays its name and the port to which it is connected.

You can edit the display name of the printer by typing in the Name field. With your printer selected, click Next. The Eee PC downloads an updated printer driver database. Then select the manufacturer of your printer and the model from the drop-down boxes. If your printer is listed, click Next. In the next screen, click the Yes radio button to print a test page, then click Finish. If your test page prints correctly, your printer is set up properly.

If your printer wasn't shown in the drop-down boxes or the test page didn't print correctly, you may be able to get the printer working by specifying a similar model. Many printers in the list use the same Linux drivers, so find a printer with a similar model name and try printing the test page again. If you have a laser printer that supports PostScript, you can also use the Linux PostScript Description (PPD) file to make the Eee PC communicate with your printer. You can find these drivers, plus information on how to install them, at www.openprinting.org.

5 INSTALLING NEW PROGRAMS AND UPDATES

The Eee PC comes with a set of useful programs, but there are a couple of exceptions. The most notable omission is an email client. Installing new programs on your Eee PC is a bit trickier than on a Windows PC, so we'll take you through installing the Kmail email program.

Asus has a server that contains all the applications that will work with the Eee PC. This

means you can download and install programs from the internet directly to the Eee PC. However, while they will all install and run, many will be too large for the Eee PC's low screen resolution so will be difficult, or impossible, to use. To browse, download and install programs, you can either use the Synaptic Package Manager, which is a graphical user interface, or the command line. We found the Synaptic Package Manager unreliable compared to the command line, so we'll use the Package Manager to browse the available programs and the command line to install them.

Make sure your Eee PC is connected to the internet, then press Ctrl-Alt-T to bring up the command line. Type 'sudo synaptic'. The Package Manager scans your system for installed packages and any additional packages available on Asus's server. You need to check that you're getting the full list of available packages from the server. Select Repositories from the Settings menu and maximise the new window. In the window at the top, there's a list of URLs where the Eee PC looks for software. Look at the Distribution section. If there is no p701 Distribution, you need to add it. Click New. Then, in the URL box, type 'http://update.eeeec.asus.com/p701'. Type 'p701' in the Distribution box and 'main' in the Section(s) box. Click OK, then click OK to dismiss the warning box and finally click Reload. You'll now have a full list of packages.

The packages are split into sections, which are listed down the left-hand side. Clicking on a section displays a list of appropriate packages in the window on the right. The icon to the left of the package shows its status. A green box means it's installed, a green box with a star means an update is available for an installed package, and a white box means a package isn't installed yet. Clicking on a package displays a description in the window below.

We now need to find Kmail. Click the Search icon, type in Kmail and click Search. You'll get several results in the right-hand pane, so scroll down until you find Kmail. Note down the name of the package, as you'll need to type it into the command line later (while Kmail is called kmail in the list, not all applications have such friendly package names). Then close Synaptic. You'll be

EXPERT TIP

To get to a command line in Easy Mode, you type Ctrl-Alt-T. In Advanced Mode, either go to Launch, Applications, System and click Console, or go to Launch, Run Command and type konsole

back at the command prompt. Type 'sudo apt-get install kmail' and follow the prompts to install the software.

Kmail is now installed, but there's no way to add an icon to load it. Whenever you want to run Kmail, you have to open a command prompt and type kmail.

If you want to remove the program, use the above command but type 'remove' instead of 'install'. You need to configure your email accounts in the same way as you would in Windows.

6 ENABLING ADVANCED MODE

If you find the standard desktop too restrictive, or prefer a more Windows-style desktop with a start menu, there's an easy way to enable the full KDE Linux desktop on the Eee PC. With the Eee PC connected to the internet, open the command line. Now type 'sudo apt-get install kicker ksmserver' and follow the prompts. Once it's installed, press the power button to bring up the power menu. There will be a new icon on the far left called Full Desktop. Click this to load up the full desktop, complete with Start-style menu. To return to the Easy mode, click on the program menu and click the Easy Mode icon.

Using the command prompt and enabling the full KDE desktop means you have far more control over the Eee PC's workings, but it also makes it possible for things to go wrong, which may make the laptop unusable. Fortunately, there's an easy way to restore the Eee PC to its factory-fresh state. Bear in mind that a factory reset will cause you to lose all your files, so back them up to a USB drive or SD card first.

Turn the Eee PC off and then on, and press F9 as soon as the grey Asus Eee PC screen is shown. This will display the boot menu. Using the arrow keys, select Restore Factory Settings and press Return, then type Yes to restore the operating system and make your Eee PC box fresh. **ES**

Next month

INTERNET ANYWHERE

Get online wherever you are by using wireless hotspots and 3G networks

